

SIMRAN –NAAM JAAP

AND USAGE OF A MALA/ROSARY

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Naam Japna is one of the three basic qualities for the way of 'Truthful Living' laid by Guru Nanak Dev Ji (Krt Karo, Vand ke Shako, Naam Jappo) and naturally forms the moral fibre of the Sikh Marg.

These qualities further expand into those of Bana, Bani, Simran and Seva as per Khalsa Maryada. Naam Jaap, alongside Swas-Gras, forms part of the discipline of Simran. Whilst Simran is not a specific technique as such, but rather a loving way of remembrance, that is to say sincerity of heart/mind/soul is the essence over the precise technique/posture/method adopted – although the latter will of course play a role in assisting the former.

One method that has almost universally adopted across all spiritual traditions to assist in the practice of prayer and meditation is the use of rosaries/prayer beads/mala. On a mala, there are generally 108 beads, or some fraction of that number. The question often arises, "Why are there 108 beads?" I have presented below an article on the numerous reasons from spiritual/religious traditions of the world as to the possible reasoning behind this number. (PLEASE NOTE: Astrological and Numerological aspects and those relating to Demi-

Gods/Goddesses, Tantric Yantras and other such like rationale is NOT line with Sikh Thought and is only provided below for purposes of understanding/information).

From the view of understanding Gurmat, I would welcome some thoughts on the following issues that arise in the adoption of Mala for Naam Simran..

1. The basic aim of a mala is to 'count' the repetition of a mantra, in our case usually the Gur-Mantr or Mool-Mantr.

-Is this not a limiting aspect, in so far as simran is concerned is should primarily develop and come into being out of one's love/devotion for Waheguru? Lovers/Devotees do not keep account of their love/devotion inspired action afterall?

- That said, I have found personally that using a mala to settle into/prepare for swas-gras simran or to aid when one is feeling tired can be useful.

2. Given the numerological/astrological roots of the significance of 108 beads (or some breakdown thereof –please refer to the second article at the bottom of this text for details of smaller derivatives of the 108-bead mala), how well does this practice relate to Gurmat?

- In that it is similar to the Brahmanical and Tantrik practices of repeating a ritual a given number of times (11x, 31x, 108x...40 days, 90 days etc) to bring about some desired result (whatever that may be)? A practice to manipulate certain energies or deities into fulfilling a certain goal or granting a boon rather than of the Gurmat, which is one of devotion, where essentially the highest desired goal is to have the gift of Naam Simran itself.

- This said, I do recall some Sakhia relating to Guru Nanak Dev Ji using a mala of 101 or 102 beads, although I am uncertain as to the authenticity of this Sakhi (if anyone knows anymore, then please advise). However, working on the premise that this Sakhi has some truth behind it, presumably Guru Ji's use of a 101/102 bead mala (whichever it was, the point being the break away from the 108 norm) was an indication that the number has no significance and the use of a mala is more a tool to aid the practice of Naam-Simran?

Please note, this is not suggesting that something is right or wrong, but simply asking for the sharing of personal experiences for guidance and advice—that is to say, here, how useful has using a Mala been in establishing one's own practice of Naam Simran. One of the reasons I ask is that Gurbani in SGGS is consistently referring to Naam Simran, although it never prescribes a particular method or technique, in line with the

Personal/Mystic relationship that each individual has with Guru Maharaja and Waheguru.

One unfortunate problem that arises out of this however is that it also gives the scores of pseudo-Sikh Babas, Sants, Deras, Ashrams and Organisations a breeding ground to preach their version of “authentic” Naam Simran , further adding to a creation of splinters in the Gur-Maryada, particular since many encourage quite Anti-Sikh practices such as using Candles and Jyot for focusing the eyes/thoughts, using photos of the Gurus in the same manner (or in some cases even their own photos!!!), the use of idols/artifacts and so on, all in the name of “aiding” one to establish their higher practice.

I do appreciate that Naam Simran is by its very nature a personal matter that not everyone may wish to share higher experiences of, although I am merely requesting guidance from the Sadh Sangat more than anything else.

Please forgive any errors on my part or any material that may be offensive. I remain forever at the feet of the Sadh Sangat,

Amar Deep Singh.

Below are some of the many reasons which have been given, as well as a few other points of interest. None of these reasons are being promoted here as more or less true than the others. However, you may notice that 108 appears to be somewhat like a road map of reality in general, and the human in particular.

Regardless of the meaning of 108, it is important that if a mala is used to count mantras, the mantra be remembered with sincerity, devotion, feeling, and full attention.

♣ **Sanskrit alphabet:** There are 54 letters in the Sanskrit alphabet. Each has masculine and feminine, shiva and shakti. 54 times 2 is 108.

♣ **Pranayama:** If one is able to be so calm in meditation as to have only 108 breaths in a day, enlightenment will come.

♣ **Upanishads:** Some say there are 108 Upanishads, texts of the wisdom of the ancient sages.

♣ **Sri Yantra:** On the Sri Yantra there are marmas where three lines intersect, and there are 54 such intersections. Each intersection has masculine and feminine, shiva and shakti qualities. 54 times 2 equals 108. Thus, there are 108 points that define the Sri Yantra as well as the human body.

♣ **9 times 12:** Both of these numbers have been said to have spiritual significance in many traditions. 9 times 12 is 108. Also, 1 plus 8 equals 9. That 9 times 12 equals 108.

♣ **Powers** of 1, 2, and 3 in math: 1 to 1st power=1; 2 to 2nd power=4 (2×2); 3 to 3rd power=27 ($3 \times 3 \times 3$). $1 \times 4 \times 27 = 108$

♣ **Desires:** There are said to be 108 earthly desires in mortals.

♣ **Lies:** There are said to be 108 lies that humans tell.

♣ **Delusions:** There are said to be 108 human delusions or forms of ignorance.

♣ **Heart Chakra:** The chakras are the intersections of energy lines, and there are said to be a total of 108 energy lines converging to form the heart chakra. One of them, sushumna leads to the crown chakra, and is said to be the path to Self-realization.

♣ **Marmas:** Marmas or marmastanas are like energy intersections called chakras, except have fewer energy lines converging to form them. There are said to be 108 marmas in the subtle body.

♣ **Time:** Some say there are 108 feelings, with 36 related to the past, 36 related to the present, and 36 related to the future.

♣ **8 extra beads:** In doing a practice of counting the number of repetitions of the mala, 100 are counted as completed. The remaining are said to cover errors or omissions. The 8 are also said to be an offering to God and Guru.

♣ **Chemistry:** Interestingly, there are about 115 elements known on the periodic table of the elements. Most of those, around or higher than the number 100 only exist in the laboratory, and some for only thousandths of a second. The number that naturally exist on Earth is around 100.

♣ **Astrology:** There are 12 constellations, and 9 arc segments called namshas or chandrakalas. 9 times 12 equals 108. Chandra is moon, and kalas are the divisions within a whole.

♣ **Planets and Houses:** In astrology, there are 12 houses and 9 planets. 12 times 9 equals 108.

♣ **Goddess names:** There are said to be 108 Indian goddess names.

♣ **Gopis of Krishna:** In the Krishna tradition, there were said to be 108 gopis or maid servants of Krishna.

♣ **1, 0, and 8:** Some say that 1 stands for God or higher Truth, 0 stands for emptiness or completeness in spiritual practice, and 8 stands for infinity or eternity.

♣ **Sun and Earth:** The diameter of the sun is 108 times the diameter of the Earth.

♣ **Numerical scale:** The 1 of 108, and the 8 of 108, when added together equals 9, which is the number of the numerical scale, i.e. 1, 2, 3 ... 10, etc., where 0 is not a number.

♣ **Meditations:** Some say there are 108 styles of meditation.

♣ **Paths to God:** Some suggest that there are 108 paths to God.

♣ **Smaller divisions:** The number 108 is divided, such as in half, third, quarter, or twelfth, so that some malas have 54, 36, 27, or 9 beads.

♣ **Hinduism:** 108 is said to refer to the number of Hindu deities. Some say that each of the deities has 108 names.

♣ **Islam:** The number 108 is used in Islam to refer to God.

♣ **Jain:** In the Jain religion, 108 are the combined virtues of five categories of holy ones, including 12, 8, 36, 25, and 27 virtues respectively.

♣ **Sikh:** The Sikh tradition has a mala of 108 knots tied in a string of wool, rather than beads.

♣ **Chinese:** The Chinese Buddhists and Taoists use a 108 bead mala, which is called su-chu, and has three dividing beads, so the mala is divided into three parts of 36 each.

♣ **Stages of the soul:** Said that Atman, the human soul or center goes through 108 stages on the journey.

♣ **Meru:** This is a larger bead, not part of the 108. It is not tied in the sequence of the other beads. It is the quiding bead, the one that marks the beginning and end of the mala.

♣ **Dance:** There are 108 forms of dance in the Indian traditions.

♣ **Praiseworthy souls:** There are 108 qualities of praiseworthy souls.

Mala Sizes and Designs

The traditional number of mala beads is 108 in the Buddhist, Hindu and yoga traditions. (For instance, the Hare Krishna movement suggests that devotees repeat their mantra 16x108 times daily.) However, many prefer a smaller mala which is easier to use and carry. For that reason, most of my malas are a fractional number of beads and can be work around the wrist or neck, or carried in a pocket.

Here are the standard sizes for malas:

- 9 beads (12 repetitions equal one complete round).
- 12 beads (9 repetitions equal one complete round).
- 18 beads (6 repetitions equal one complete round).
- 27 beads (4 repetitions equal one complete round).
- 36 beads (3 repetitions equal one complete round).
- 54 beads (2 repetitions equal one complete round).
- 108 beads (1 repetition equals one complete round).